

The University of Chicago

CONTRIBUTIONS OF MENNONITE
MUTUAL AID TO A PARTICULAR
CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY

A PART OF A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO
THE FACULTY OF THE DIVINITY SCHOOL IN
CANDIDACY FOR THE DEGREE OF DOCTOR
OF PHILOSOPHY

1941

By
J. WINFIELD FRETZ

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CHICAGO, ILLINOIS

Reprinted from
THE BETHEL COLLEGE BULLETIN, Vol. XXIX, No. 5, February, 1942

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By J. Winfield Fretz

A. Definition of the Particular Community

The entire discussion of Mennonite mutual aid is based on two major underlying assumptions. The first is that mutual aid in general, whether Mennonite or any other type, is a universal social factor. Evidence of this can be found in either the animal kingdom or among human beings in any age and at all times. The types of mutual aid, however, vary with the environment and the situations in which they are found. The second assumption is that Mennonite mutual aid has its roots deeply entrenched in the Christian tradition. Its basic sociological pattern is that of the primitive Christian community. The relation of Mennonite mutual aid as a social practice to this second basic assumption comes about by way of the religious principles and the historic traditions of the Mennonite Church. Mutual aid among the Mennonites cannot be understood apart from the history, the religious principles, and the sociological nature of the Mennonites themselves.

Mutual aid is only one factor in the Mennonite culture and way of life but it is one of the most important factors from the standpoint of determining the character and significance of the Mennonites as a social group. It is a prominent social practice that has been characteristic of Mennonites throughout their entire life. It has been practiced in spontaneous, informal ways, and in systematic and organized forms; it has been practiced both within the Mennonite fellowship and between Mennonite and non-Mennonite individuals and groups, but it has always been a characteristic practice. The nature of mutual aid has varied with time and with the particular group in which it has been practiced. As certain branches of the Mennonite Church have lost more and more of their sect characteristics and become gradually accommodated to the larger society the amount of informal, spontaneous mutual aid decreased. But over against this has been the gradual increase of organized economic co-operative activities in those branches of the church which became less isolated from the "world" and gradually more assimilated. The implications of this tendency will be pointed out presently in this discussion.

Mennonite mutual aid is characterized above everything else by its religious nature. This fact has great sociological and ethical significance. From the sociological

standpoint, the practice of mutual aid motivated by religion results in the attempt to establish a community on the basis of a Christian brotherhood. From the ethical standpoint it results in the search for, and to some degree the demonstration of, love as a way of life that goes beyond mere legal justice. The result has been the development of a socio-religious organization of a half million individuals scattered over Europe and America. This organization is composed of a large number of integrated, small communities or cells which are spiritually and organically related to form the whole body of the Mennonite Church.

It is our purpose in this study to show how mutual aid has contributed toward making these individual communities and the Mennonite Community as a whole more Christian. It is our thesis that mutual aid has contributed toward the establishment of a Christian community. The particular community referred to is the Mennonite community. This raises the question as to what is meant by a Mennonite Christian community. It may also prompt the question as to what significance a contribution to the Mennonite community will have to society as a whole. Both these points will be answered in the course of this discussion.

The concept of Christian community as understood and defined by the Mennonites will be treated only in summary form here.¹ To the Mennonite the concepts of church and community are generally one and the same thing. They may be referred to interchangeably and used synonymously without abusing either term.

The central idea of Christian community as understood by the Mennonites is that the church, being composed of adult men and women who have fully consecrated their lives to Christ, should set up exemplary communities, or a community if the term is used in a collective sense. The members of this community or communities are not to pattern their lives after the ways and the fashions of the secular world, but after the will of God and the Spirit of Christ. God's will and Christ's spirit are discerned through the guidance of the Holy Spirit as directly revealed by God and as taught in the Scriptures. The Christian community is thought of as a Christian brotherhood, a communion of saints, a fellowship of believers. Each member of the brotherhood is one in whom the spirit of Jesus supposedly rules every relationship of life. Within the community there are no sharp lines drawn between the sacred and the secular; all the activities of life are considered sacred. The true Christian community is to keep itself "unspotted by the world." That has not always been interpreted as spatial separation or physical isolation but rather as a different kind of behavior from that of the "world." A behavior that takes its standards and patterns not from the secular society but from standards derived from the Scriptures and from Christian tradition.

The Mennonite conception of Christian community is based on an imitation

1. For a fuller discussion of the Mennonite concept of the church see the author's article, "Mennonites and Their Economic Problems," in the *Mennonite Quarterly Review*, XIV (October, 1940), 195-213.

of the primitive Christian community. They, like the early Christians, are concerned with making the religion of Jesus vital in their everyday lives. Profound theologies, elaborate creeds, and long rituals are of little concern to them. They frown upon such things as useless, vain, and superficial. They are concerned with establishing vigorous communities that are spontaneously and divinely inspired. The true Christian community, for them, is one where the members form a Christian fellowship which is earnestly bent on demonstrating the "good life" for the glory of God as an example to a secular society.

There are five basic principles which have always characterized the Mennonite conception of a Christian community. The first is the centrality of Christ. The personality and teachings of Jesus are at the heart of such a community. One of the early leaders of the group said: "God's community knows no head but Christ. No other can be endured for it is a brother and a sisterhood."

According to Mennonites, any community that claims to be thoroughly Christian must be characterized first of all by its recognition of the primacy of Jesus Christ. Jesus symbolized his place in the community as being that of a "vine" and all his followers in relation to him as branches. At other times he is spoken of symbolically as the "way," the "door," "the light of the world," etc. All of these references indicate that Jesus thought of himself as at the center of the new community, or at least his biographers thought of him as holding the central place in the new religious fellowship.

This characterization of a Christian community must be understood in a relative sense. Most American communities consider themselves "Christian." The Lynds discovered in their study of *Middletown* that people think of a Christian community as synonymous with a civilized community. They do not look upon a Christian community as being particularly different in its ethical behavior and moral conduct from the conduct and behavior of society in general. The personality and teachings of Jesus are taken for granted; they do not seem to be consciously present in most economic and political transactions. And yet they are not completely absent because they are rooted in the customs and manners of a large number of the people. Thus, it cannot be categorically said that communities calling themselves Christians are not Christian. We must perhaps be satisfied to say that most so-called communities are unconsciously and partially Christian. Christianity is a part of the cultural heritage and traditions.

The relative factor holds true also for the Mennonite communities, in that they are not thoroughly Christian when measured even by their own ideals. Because of their historical background and sociological nature as a religious sect they may, however, be more consciously aware of their commitment to the Christian patterns and traditions.

A second characteristic which Mennonites have deemed essential to a Christian community is the presence and guidance of the Holy Spirit. It is true that we

are in danger of "impoverishing our thinking about the Holy Spirit" when we try to give it some special character as Aubrey has reminded us.² Nevertheless, we need to describe its work and its importance in somewhat greater detail. The Holy Spirit is the agent which "acts as bond between men by which true community is made possible, the community which lies at the root of the Christian fellowship, and which describes the life of the Kingdom of God."³ The Holy Spirit displays itself in its creative nature. It has a noticeable transforming power in the lives of those through whom it operates.⁴ It may be the essential element in the primary group which Faris calls the emotional character which binds members into a relation one to another.⁵

The idea of the Holy Spirit has traditionally served the Mennonites not only as a cohesive force to draw men together and keep them harmoniously bound together, but it has served as a guiding light which manifested itself through the human conscience. As we have said earlier, the conscience has always been considered an important agency by Mennonites as the means of discerning the divine Will. While Mennonites have never attempted to define or describe the nature of the Holy Spirit in academic terms, they have recognized and appreciated its practical values, nevertheless. They have not referred to it as the "rationale of the universe" whereby the structure of the world is held together; nor as the Logos, or the creative Word. They have rather accepted the more simple view that all its values were manifested in Jesus of Nazareth and ascertainable through imitation of him and obedience to his teaching.

A third major characteristic of the Mennonite conception of what constitutes a Christian community is that the social relationships of such a community must at all times be based on love and trust rather than dependence on force and fear. This principle is an absolute in that it is taught as valid for all social relations at all times and under all circumstances. There are no exceptions, and no rational justifications for the use of force in times of emergency such as violent industrial disorders or civil and international wars. This conception is in line with the teaching of Jesus, whom Holt reminds us, seems confidently to have expected that a Christian community would be characterized by social faith, justice, and brotherliness, to supplant relationships based on autocratic compulsion, fear, and heredity.⁶ Aubrey has expressed this characteristic principle of social relationship in a Christian community in words that Mennonites can wholeheartedly accept.

They find their common source in God, the creative unity which makes the world a universe; their mutual dependence in brotherhood, where each to each in mutual trust makes a contribution to the correction and enrichment

2. Edwin E. Aubrey, *Man's Search for Himself* (Nashville: Cokesbury Press, 1940), p. 196.

3. *Ibid.*

4. The Pauline writings furnish much evidence on this point as do the numerous Pentacostal and Holiness sects of our own day.

5. Ellsworth Faris, *The Nature of Human Nature* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1937), p. 45.

6. Arthur E. Holt, *This Nation under God* (Chicago: Willett, Clark & Co., 1939), p. 192.

of life; and their common destiny in the Kingdom of God, towards which they all work and in which the fullness of fellowship is to be found, presaged by love.⁷

This doctrine or characteristic has always been a very important one, possibly because it can be more easily understood and practiced by everyone than a principle such as the leading of the Holy Spirit. In Mennonite communities it has been constantly stressed and frequently put to actual tests in the numerous persecutions endured by the group.

A further characteristic of a Christian community as seen by the Mennonites is the sacredness and the importance of every individual member of the community. This is perhaps most vividly illustrated in the traditional views held and taught by the Mennonites that each individual has the right and the duty to interpret the Scriptures according to the light given to him by God. This is related to the concept of the priesthood of all believers and the relative unimportance of the institutional aspects of the church. In spite of the fact that Mennonites have always been communally-minded, the individual members of the community have theoretically been granted great freedom of conscience. Many scholars agree that our modern conceptions of religious toleration and freedom of conscience spring originally from the early Anabaptist and Mennonite teachings.

This respect for individual personality results in the concern for progressive growth and development of the individual. It is the richest community which can enrich every individual within the community while at the same time enriching the entire community.⁸ The test of such a community is whether by its nature, its structure, its purpose, and by its general behavior it evokes in human beings those attitudes which are consistent with ultimate spiritual growth. And also whether such a community inducts its members into "the experience of increasing self-growth, reliance upon truth rather than force, the use of the imagination in determining what is good, capacity to associate with others in an experience of social faith, and a courageous belief in the ultimate triumph of spiritual values."⁹

It has been the traditional view of the Mennonites and it is the naive opinion of the writer that the growth and development of the individual in a Christian community can best be attained when he acquires and develops the attitudes and the spirit of Christ in his own life. Angus expresses this essential of the Christian community frankly.

Christianity expresses itself in cult and ritual, in philosophy and theology, in art and poetry, but its essential expression is in Christ-likeness. . . . The task of Christianity is to concentrate on the production of Christ-like character of mankind transformed and informed by the spirit of Christ.¹⁰ Becoming Christ-like does not require literal imitation of every custom and deed

7. Aubrey, *op. cit.*, p. 212.

8. Alvin Pitcher, "The Religious Problem of Community in Contemporary Thought" (Unpublished D. B. thesis, Divinity School, University of Chicago, 1939), p. 4.

9. Holt, *This Nation under God*, p. 179.

10. S. Angus, *Essential Christianity* (New York: Macmillan, 1939), p. 158.

of Jesus' earthly life. It means rather the development of the attitudes and the spirit of Jesus in ourselves toward God, the natural world, and toward our fellowmen.

The characteristic of progressive growth and development of the individual of which we are speaking applies especially to the moral, ethical, and spiritual growth. Mennonites have always assumed that intellectual development was secondary to spiritual development; that intellectual development was rather a natural product resulting from moral purity and spiritual maturity. The natural consequence of individual growth is growth of the community; not numerically or geographically but morally, ethically, and spiritually. This is what we understand Jesus' implication to have been when he claimed the Kingdom of God was "within you," but that it also spreads out and grows and reproduces like the mustard seed and a grain of wheat. The Mennonites, as have many other Protestant groups, operated on the assumption that the Kingdom would ultimately be established by diffusion of the leaven of the numerous small communities.

There is a fifth characteristic which is typical of the Mennonite ideal of a Christian community. It is expressed in the doctrine of the suffering church. This teaching stresses the importance of being willing to suffer for one's religious convictions. There seem to be two main reasons accounting for this doctrine. In the first place, it is adhered to because Jesus suffered and taught others to be willing to suffer; and second, it is believed to have practical spiritual value to the one who endures suffering. Thomas Munzer, whose teachings on other matters were generally rejected, spoke for the Mennonites on this point when he claimed that it was necessary to bear one's cross in order to understand the Bible, to know God completely, and to attain salvation. He rightfully claimed, further, that the suffering which comes from cross bearing cleanses the soul and prepares it for the Spirit of God.¹¹ This principle has been of great value in enabling the Mennonite communities to endure persecution and yet retain loyalty to the principle of love and goodwill toward all men.

The Mennonite conception of what constitutes a Christian community, then, is embodied in these five characteristics. Such a community must acknowledge as its ideal and aim the realization of these five social and religious characteristics. There are other characteristics which are important but we hold these five as minimum essentials. The characteristics here stated as Mennonite ideals of a truly Christian community are nowhere specifically outlined in any doctrine, or creed, of the Mennonite Church. They are, however, clearly implied in the religious and social principles and practices of the Mennonites.

11. This principle usually comes into prominence in times of crisis. It is probably related to the martyr-complex of the religious sect. Among Mennonites it has its conflict basis in the doctrine of separation from the "world." Cf. D. W. Riddle, *The Martyrs* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1931), *passim*.

The characteristics of Christian community enumerated above are ideals, not completely accomplished social facts. No Mennonite community has absolutely attained unto these ideals but many have striven for them. They are the goals and patterns which are being sought for in actual social practice. The community earnestly seeking to fulfill these ideals, and in a measure approximating them, is fulfilling the Mennonite definition of a Christian community. Mennonites have tried to realize these social ideals but nowhere have they completely succeeded; being human they have the weaknesses and failings of human beings. The best they have been able to do is approximate their ideal. This raises the question as to the methods employed to develop their ideal. It is at this point that mutual aid as an important social element in the Mennonite way of life becomes relevant.

In this discussion we wish to establish the thesis that mutual aid is a contributing factor to the establishment of Christian community among the Mennonites. It is to be noted that mutual aid is not the only factor, but merely one of the factors, contributing toward this end.

By mutual aid, as conceived by the Mennonites, is meant the voluntary working together of two or more individuals or groups for the purpose of achieving common objectives by means which are commensurate with the ends sought. In a genuine mutual relationship there must be reciprocity on the part of all parties concerned. As Espinas said, there is mutual aid "when the commensal is not less useful to his host than the latter is to the commensal himself."¹² Mennonite mutual aid might be defined as a form of social service motivated by Christian love. This means love for the enemy and prayers for the persecutor as well as for the friend and the protector. It means doing good to them that hate you, and it means attempting to overcome evil with good. This is why Mennonite mutual aid is contrary to war and violence. In war, individuals and groups do not make the means commensurate with the ends; they cannot love and serve friend and enemy alike; there cannot be a mutually reciprocating relationship between all parties concerned and hence there can be no Mennonite mutual aid.

B. *Contributions of Mutual Aid to This Community*

As we have seen earlier in this discussion, mutual aid may be expressed in a variety of ways. Its contribution to the development of a Christian community may be either spiritual or physical; either metaphysical or sociological, that is, it may contribute toward the development of ideals, beliefs, and attitudes such as love, brotherly kindness, trust, faith, truth, beauty, and honesty; or it may contribute to the development of such concrete objectives as the building of social institutions, the requiring of economic wealth and social improvements.

The first contribution mutual aid makes toward the establishment of Chris-

12. Robert A. Park and Ernest W. Burgess, *An Introduction to the Science of Sociology* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1924), p. 168. A translated quotation from Alfred Espinas, *Des societes animales* (1878), pp. 157 ff.

tian community as viewed by the Mennonites is the demonstration of the primary group ideal of love and brotherhood. These ideals are taken out beyond the intimate realm of the family and are expressed on a community basis. We have cited numerous illustrations of the practice of mutual aid beyond the immediate local community or neighborhood. Mennonites have demonstrated that mutual aid can be expressed between individuals and groups where there is no face-to-face relation and where the bonds of union are only a common faith or a common sympathy. This is being demonstrated at the present time through such activities as reconstruction work in Europe and the maintenance of Civilian Public Service camps in America.

Mennonites have always refused to participate in war or civil violence of any kind because of its contradiction to the admonition of Jesus to love one's enemies. Cooley branded war as a secondary ideal.¹³ This is important for our consideration of mutual aid. War and violence are contrary to all primary group ideals and they are contrary to the practice of mutual aid. To fight and hate and kill are contrary to assisting, loving, and conserving. Mutual aid is positive social action; war is negative. Because Mennonites have insisted on expressing mutual aid in times of international conflict as well as in times of peace, the expression of mutual aid has appeared unpatriotic and traitorous. It actually has been the expression of a primary group ideal in a situation where the primary and secondary ideals were in conflict. Mennonites have, by their insistence on the expression of mutual aid under all conditions, refused to subordinate the primary to the secondary ideals. This practice of mutual aid in the face of danger and in spite of opposition by the state is related to the doctrine of the suffering church. It is necessary to express mutual aid even if it means suffering and punishment for those practicing it. This expression of mutual assistance motivated by Christian love and brotherly kindness contributes to a closer bond of union within the community and manifests to those without a sense of interest and common sympathy.

True Christian community requires identification of common interests, and interest develops as a result of love and concern for the other person.¹⁴ In identification one person's interests are, in some respects, another's interests. It is the type of identification which Paul seems to have been thinking of in his exposition of the nature of the Christian Church when he said: "And whether one member suffer, all the members suffer with it; or one member be honored, all the members rejoice with it."¹⁵ It is this type of identification that we observe in the case of Mennonite mutual aid practiced between individuals and groups within the Mennonite Church as well as between Mennonite groups and non-Mennonite groups. In the case of the reconstruction work now being carried on in Europe, Mennonites are identifying themselves with their victimized European fellowmen to the extent of sharing their own

13. Charles Horton Cooley, *Social Organization* (New York: Scribner, 1916), p. 37.

14. Pitcher, *op. cit.*, p. 80.

15. I Cor. 12:26.

possessions, praying for their welfare, sympathizing with their distress, and, a limited few, are going into the danger zones and enduring the hardships with their European brothers. This type of common sharing and mutual identification binds the participating groups together. It produces a stronger "we" feeling and creates morale and esprit de corps. This is a contribution to the development of Christian community among the Mennonites.

The more permanent and endurable the common interests, the more significant they are.¹⁶ Members of a social group who have toiled and struggled together for a long period of time over a common problem are likely to be more closely bound than those who have recently become acquainted and have had few common interests and only temporary contacts. This is important in understanding the significance of mutual aid for Mennonite communities. Mennonites have had common interests and common struggles and have suffered common hardships over a period of centuries and in this way have learned to work together for the common good of the group. The mutual aid expressed at the present time in the maintaining of the civilian public service camps is an illustration of the way a sense of community within the Mennonite Church has been developed and expressed throughout history. Mennonites are here engaged in carrying out a common task; in fulfilling a purpose. The purpose is to do good instead of evil; to love instead of hate; to be positive in action instead of negative or neutral. The expression of love and common trust requires no apologies and causes no regrets as does the expression of their opposites. These positive notes of mutual aid make permanent community possible. Holt has expressed the importance of this factor in discussing the characteristics of Christian community:

All communities held together by force and fear will break down by virtue of their own self-generated hatred. Christians are those who make permanent community life possible because they are willing to give justice, and give it first, and thus become the creators of social faith and good will.¹⁷

A second contribution of mutual aid to Christian community is the development of social responsibility on the part of individuals and groups. Mutual aid is a contribution to social solidarity and social cohesion. When men work together to accomplish common purposes in the spirit of brotherly love, they do more than finish the particular jobs they set out to do. Working side by side at common tasks they influence each other; learn to know each other's likes and dislikes; appreciate each other's ideals and interests. They share each other's joys and sorrows and are jealous of each other's successes. All of these contacts and influences tend to build social responsibility in the individuals and groups participating.

Mennonites have taught the importance of assuming responsibility through mutual aid in various ways. Through community hospitals they have learned to assume responsibility for each other in times of sickness and distress; through old people's homes they have been taught that caring for the older members of the com-

16. Pitcher, *op. cit.*, pp. 80 ff.

17. A. E. Holt, *Social Work in the Churches* (Chicago: Pilgrim Press, 1922), p. 4.

munity intelligently is a group responsibility. The mutual insurance societies have impressed upon the participating members the need and importance of sharing each other's losses due to accident, storm, or death. Mutual participation in co-operative economic enterprises has taught them to appreciate the significance of sharing common profits and losses.

Through mutual ownership and control of their enterprises members of mutual aid organizations not only learn to share in proportion to their contribution the advantages and disadvantages of the society, but they also have the advantage of being able to control and determine the ethical and moral practices to be permitted. This has been very significant in Mennonite mutual aid societies because of the frequent divergence between their religious principles and ethical practices and those of the larger secular society or the "world" around them. The power and influence of the mutually operating group has frequently been more effective in combating unethical and immoral social practices than a single individual owner might have been able to do. Mennonite mutual aid is thus contributing to the development of group ethical and social responsibility.

In this connection it should be said that this sense of responsibility is impressed upon the individual at a very early age. In the Mennonite community it is a part of the Christian nurture. It is an extension of the intimate family behavior into the larger community relationships. It is assumed that the church or the community through its control of education, at least on the elementary level, can train its children to practice mutual aid just as it can train them to observe the customs of dress and group morality. The children grow up in a culture where mutual aid is the accustomed basis of social relations and where they never expect Christian behavior to be otherwise. In this way the ideal and practice of assuming responsibility is transmitted from generation to generation. This type of behavior has been encouraged and controlled by the church over a long period of time and, hence, becomes the accepted way of social behavior. It is considered the only proper way for members of a large Christian family or brotherhood to act toward one another. To the extent that mutual aid develops social responsibility it also contributes to the development of the kind of Christian community Mennonites are striving for.

A third contribution which mutual aid makes toward the establishment of Christian community is its effective use of religion in direct social action. So predominant is the religious element in Mennonite mutual aid that we consider it the chief characteristic which distinguishes it from all non-Mennonite mutual aid and co-operative activities. Religion serves as a reconciling agent within the mutual aid societies. It serves to dissolve jealousies and hatreds between members, or it at least minimizes them and thus frequently prevents differences of opinion from leading to open conflict and breaches of friendship. The religious element in Mennonite mutual aid also provides an effective motivation for ethical and moral action which is not provided in societies based on purely commercial and moral foundations. It is the

religious character of Mennonite mutual aid which largely accounts for its power of survival as a group technique through the centuries.

There have been very few failures of Mennonite mutual aid societies. This is in contrast with the large number of failures of mutual aid societies found in society in general. Hankins points out that of the 3,500 mutual assessment associations formed during the period between 1870 and 1910, fully 3,000 failed after an average life of fifteen years.¹⁸ This means that the death rate of these societies was 86 per cent. An almost equally high death rate could be shown for socialistic experiments in community living.¹⁹ Among the causes listed for the failures of these mutual associations and co-operative communities are the following: dissatisfaction with the leaders, rebellion against discipline, poor management, indifference on the part of members, conflicting interests, internal jealousies, selfish desires to protect jobs and personal investments and financial bankruptcies.²⁰ While it is unwise to conclude that religion alone is the factor accounting for the success of Mennonite mutual aid organizations and the absence of religion the factor accounting for the failure of non-Mennonite organizations, we cannot overlook the fact that religion is an important factor in determining the success or failure of any mutual enterprise.

In Mennonite mutual aid societies, religion has served as a remedy and a reducing agent for attitudes of selfishness, jealousy, and indifference toward the common good. It has not eliminated these unwholesome social attitudes but it has helped to control them and it has kept unsocial-minded individuals sufficiently reconciled to prevent the break-up of an organization.

The religious element in Mennonite mutual aid has played still another important function. It has kept aid societies from doing what Holt calls "going over to the law of the markets." That is, the primary goal or *raison d'être* shifts from the original purpose of providing mutual assistance to its members to that of making financial profits. The service motive thus becomes secondary and the securing of profits the primary motive. From the standpoint of social ethics this is an undesirable transition. It is moving in a direction away from the ideal of love and concern for the welfare of members of the brotherhood. Out of twenty Mennonite mutual societies only one has shifted from the religious to the commercial basis of operation. Others, while admitting non-Mennonites into their membership, have still retained the service motive as the sole reason for existing. We attribute this significant fact to the predominating element of religion in the Mennonite mutual aid societies.

The importance of religion as a cohesive force in mutual aid societies and in co-operative communities has been emphasized by Brinton as a result of a recent

18. Frank Hankins, "Fraternal Orders," *Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences*, Vol. VI (1932).

19. Richard L. Hawkins, *Positivism in the United States* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1938), p. 110.

20. James Warbasse, *Cooperative Democracy* (New York: Harper, 1936), pp. 173 f.

study of one hundred planned communities in which a highly idealistic pattern of life was developed. This study revealed that those communities which were based on religious principles have a longer average life span than those which were purely secular and based on utopian idealism. The secular communities seldom lasted for more than a year, while the religious communities often lasted through two or more generations. Brinton advances a convincing explanation for this interesting discovery. He says:

Ego-centricity wrecks community life, but a genuinely vital religion reduces self-interest and merges the individual into a larger whole. Community grows out of humility, self-sacrifice, the submission of the isolated human will to the will of God. These are not only the essence of religious faith and particularly of the Christian faith but they are also prerequisites for the peaceable and cooperative life of men with their neighbors. Without them community life is impossible except on the basis of enlightened self-interest, which seems to have proved a feeble and flickering light at best.²¹

The conclusions arrived at as a result of the above study bear out our contention, namely, that religion is a vital factor in Mennonite communities and in Mennonite mutual aid practices. It is the religious factor which provides cohesion, stability, and permanency to Mennonite mutual aid. And this, in turn, is a contribution toward the development of a Christian community. It seems that religion possesses a preventive formula for unwholesome social attitudes which intellectual enlightenment alone does not possess.

The fourth contribution of Mennonite mutual aid to Christian community as conceived by the Mennonites is that mutual aid is an expression of economic and political democracy in action. Democracy is used here in the sense Merriam has defined and used the term. He has laid down five basic assumptions which he claims underlie the theory of democracy. All of these assumptions, he claims, have been influenced and shaped by Christian tradition. The five assumptions are: first, that there is an essential dignity to all men and that it is important to protect and cultivate personality primarily on a fraternal rather than on a differential basis;²² second, that there is a constant trend in human affairs toward the perfectibility of mankind;²³ third, that the gains of the commonwealth are essentially mass gains and should be diffused through the mass by whom they were created as rapidly as possible;²⁴ fourth, that the power of the commonwealth should be in the hands of the people with recognized procedures for the formulation and execution of such power;²⁵ fifth, that there can be conscious social change brought about through consent rather than violence.²⁶ In the light of the previous discussion in this study we shall not

21. Howard H. Brinton, "The Price of Peace Making," *Pendle Hill Bulletin*, No. 34 (June, 1940).

22. Charles E. Merriam, *The New Democracy and the New Despotism* (New York: Whittlesey House, 1939), p. 12.

23. *Ibid.*, p. 34.

24. *Ibid.*, p. 37.

25. *Ibid.*, p. 38.

26. *Ibid.*, p. 42.

emphasize each one of these points. We see a close similarity in the basic assumptions of democracy as set forth by Merriam and the characteristics of a Christian community as defined earlier.

Finally, Mennonite mutual aid contributes to the type of economic and social conditions which make effective community living possible, and hence, contribute at the same time toward the development of a Christian community. Mutual aid among the Mennonites is a demonstration of what Aldous Huxley calls "unlimited liability."²⁷ In the traditional Mennonite community individual members possess nothing and everything—nothing as individuals and everything as joint owners of communal and semi-communally held property and communal and semi-communally produced goods. Property has traditionally been looked upon as a trust from God over which men merely exercised stewardship. In the more liberal branches of Mennonites the communal and semi-communal philosophy of property has noticeably declined in favor of the more capitalistic individualism. There are, nevertheless, still many aspects of group life where the semi-communal philosophy is strong. Wherever this is true there is a tendency to assume "unlimited liability," on the part of the members of the group. It has provided a liberal education in responsibility, loyalty, and consideration.

Mutual aid has tended to control great economic and social inequalities within Mennonite communities. This, we hold, is a significant achievement toward Christian community. Huxley has defined some of the characteristics he thinks important for a Christian community.

Impediments to bridge building will be most numerous in communities where inequalities of income and inequalities of education are very great and where the social pattern is hierarchical and authoritarian. They will be fewest in communities where the principles of self-government are most widely applied; where responsible group life is most intense, and where inequalities of income and education are small.... The most propitious environment for equality is constituted by a society where the means of production are owned co-operatively, where power is decentralized and where the community is organized in a multiplicity of small, interrelated but as far as may be, self-governing groups of mutually responsible men and women.²⁸

The characteristics here set forth by Huxley are those to which mutual aid has significantly contributed in Mennonite local communities. As we have observed earlier, the majority of Mennonites have a high degree of self-government; relatively few inequalities of an economic and social nature; economic and political power is decentralized; a certain percentage of the economic activities are co-operatively owned and the communities for the most part are small, interrelated, and composed of men and women who are mutually responsible to one another.

C. Implications for the Larger Christian Community

In the preceding pages we demonstrated how Mennonite mutual aid was a contributing factor toward the development of a particular kind of Christian com-

27. Aldous Huxley, *Ends and Means* (New York: Harper, 1937), p. 50.

28. *Ibid.*, p. 194.

munity, namely, Christian community as defined by the Mennonites. We now wish to suggest a number of implications that Mennonite mutual aid has for the larger Christian community. The term Christian community in this larger sense may be thought of either sociologically as a world-wide social community, a universal brotherhood, or it may be thought of in the metaphysical sense of a universal community of ideas without regard to concrete social facts.

It is our supposition that if Mennonite mutual aid makes an effective contribution toward the establishment of a Christian community involving approximately a half million people, which is the estimated number of Mennonites in the world, then by implication, it should have some bearing on the society beyond its own immediate community. In fact one can rightfully raise the question if Mennonites have not already made the influence of mutual aid felt in the larger society. If they have contributed, or at least suggested, such widely accepted ideas as religious toleration, separation of church and state, pacifism, and freedom of conscience,²⁹ then it is fair to inquire if mutual aid, a life-long teaching and practice of the Mennonites, may not also have been, in part, accepted by the larger society. This is not a point to be proved but rather a point to be raised for further investigation. It is one of the implications of Mennonite mutual aid for the larger Christian community.

Most of the Mennonites in America are settled in rural communities. In 1940 the percentage was eighty-seven. These communities range in size from a few hundred to a few thousand inhabitants. The social relations are chiefly of an intimate, primary group sort. This fact is significant because there are thousands of non-Mennonite small communities scattered over the country in many ways similar to Mennonite communities.³⁰ It is possible that mutual aid as practiced by the Mennonites might spread out to these thousands of similar small rural communities and become the accepted social practice. If enough rural communities accept this co-operative social philosophy and technique, the entire social order would eventually be affected by it.

Holt has pointed out the importance of the small community as a factor in the development of a more Christian society. He says:

The family and the small community of village and farm are the nourishing home responsible living for people who want to be responsible. There is nothing inherent in these institutions which guarantees responsible living. They can be places where people cause one another the most intense

29. Ernest Southerland Bates, **American Faith** (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 1940), pp. 34-59; W. J. M'Glothlin, "Anabaptism," **Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics**, ed. Hastings, I (1908), 406-12; Thomas Lindsay, **A History of the Reformation**, II (New York: Scribner, 1907), 30-53; Rufus Jones, **Studies in Mystical Religion** (New York: Macmillan, 1923), pp. 369-96; Carl Heath, **Social and Religious Heretics in Five Centuries** (London: Allenson & Co., 1936), pp. 35 ff.

30. Edmund deS. Brunner and John H. Kolb, **Rural Social Trends** (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1933), pp. 233 ff., have estimated that the 24,000,000 farm people may be divided into three types: ten million who live in villages and hamlets which serve as farm trade centers; four million who live in industrial villages; the remaining ten million who live in rural areas but work in cities. There are 13,433 rural incorporated places and 8,000 villages that are unincorporated and 35,000 unincorporated hamlets.

pain and most thoroughly exploit one another. But if the motives for responsible living are strong, the family and the small community become the first laboratories of citizenship. In the family individuals learn the significance of loyalty to something larger than themselves. The responsibility is distributed among the members, each of whom achieves freedom only by discharging responsibly the functions assigned to him.³¹

The determining factor as to whether the small community is a promoter of responsible living is dependent on the motivation behind it. Among the Mennonites we have said this motive was very largely a religious motive and that it was a constructive force toward the realization of an ideal Christian community. It seems possible that many of these thousands of non-Mennonite communities might also develop mutual aid motivated by religion.

According to T. S. Eliot the ideal Christian community is something on the order of the English rural parish. He says the community must be "small enough to consist of a nexus of direct personal relations between one person and another."³² Such a community, he said, was one in which there was a unified religious-social code of behavior. The religious life of the people in such a community would be largely a matter of behavior and conformity; social customs, he said, would take on religious sanctions. Eliot's view is much like that of Huxley's in that both emphasize the importance of the small community as small working models of the better society imagined by social prophets of all ages.

Aubrey has expressed this same point of view in discussing the contributions individual communities or churches can make to the larger society.

The churches today can be nuclei of this spirit of unity in diversity, active groups showing the world that it is possible to live together in peace and concord. We may not know much of technical financial problems, or of industrial managerial methods, or of the most efficient means of distribution of a given product; but we can live together in the fellowship of the church as members one of another.... A demonstration of this living community is the world's greatest need just now—perhaps always. Without it exhortation is futile, however eloquent it may be.³³

Most people find example more convincing than argument and the fact that a theory or an ideal has actually worked is better recommendation for its soundness than any amount of ingenious dialectic. Mennonites have generally proceeded on this assumption. They have been short on theology and on creeds; they have gotten little publicity and sought still less, but through the practice of mutual aid they have sought to establish small working models of ideal Christian communities. To the extent that this has been done, religiously motivated mutual aid has been a prominent factor in it. Mennonites have believed that enough good little communities would ultimately determine the character of the one unified whole Christian community or society. Because Mennonites are settled chiefly in small rural communities, and be-

31. Holt, *This Nation under God*, p. 75.

32. T. S. Eliot, *The Idea of Christian Society* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & Co., 1940), pp. 29 f.

33. Aubrey, *op. cit.*, p. 201.

cause Mennonite mutual aid has contributed toward the creation of a particular Christian community, Mennonite mutual aid has the greatest implications for the thousands of small non-Mennonite rural communities.

There is a further implication of Mennonite mutual aid for the larger society. At the present time there is an almost universal trend toward greater social collectivism. It is a commonplace to say that the day of individualism is past. But the question is what kind of collectivism shall the future develop? It is our belief that the new collectivism should have at least two characteristics if it is to contribute toward the establishment of a Christian world order. It should be a voluntary co-operative type of collectivism and it should be motivated by, and permeated with, a genuine religious spirit.

While a collective or a co-operative economy may succeed economically without the religious basis, it will require a religious base if it is to contribute most significantly to Christian community. Carl Hutchinson has pointed out the reason for this. He says:

It has been demonstrated that a cooperative can succeed on an economic basis without apparent use of cultural and religious appeal. However, I anticipate your study will discover that those societies which are united around something more than the "cash nexus" have a better prognosis for survival than the sheer economic cooperative. Here is where I believe the religious societies can definitely demonstrate a superiority in social cohesion and unity.³⁴

This statement emphasizes our point of view on the importance of the religious factor in mutual aid as a powerful cohesive element. It is this characteristic of Mennonite mutual aid which might advantageously be appropriated by non-Mennonite co-operative societies which are organized on a purely economic basis. It is a factor which has suggestive value to those who look to the Co-operative Movement as the ideal economic system through which to develop a Christian world order.

Perhaps the greatest implications of Mennonite mutual aid for non-Mennonite groups are those for individuals and communities immediately adjacent to or intermingled with Mennonite communities. Here the idea of mutual aid could very likely spread through the process of social interaction. This is certainly true in mutual aid organizations and co-operatives where non-Mennonite members are admitted on the same basis as Mennonites. In such situations mutual aid would tend to spread by diffusion.

D. Limitations of Mennonite Mutual Aid

We have shown the numerous desirable features of the Mennonite community and of Mennonite mutual aid. There is, however, another side to this story. Mennonite mutual aid has definite limitations and it is a necessary part of this discussion to frankly state them. While it is true that the Mennonite communities such as we have described are for the most part democratically organized, religiously motivated,

³⁴. Carl Hutchinson, correspondence, August 13, 1938. Hutchinson is the director of organization and education of the Ohio Farm Bureau.

culturally seasoned with homogeneous traditions and heritages, having relative social and economic equality, possessing a high degree of social unity and economic stability and carrying on many of the everyday activities through techniques of mutual aid, not everything within these communities is praiseworthy. There are numerous uncommendable factors and it is well for us to present a word of warning against overidealization of the achievements of mutual aid or of the quality of Mennonite community life.

This warning applies equally to the complacent "insider" and to the tired and confused "outsider" who has a tendency to cast a longing glance at the small, quiet, and relatively stable religious community. The seeming social harmony and group equanimity are especially attractive to the "outsider" who is disturbed and restless because of the frightening uncertainties and the confusing perplexities he faces in the larger modern society. The small close-knit religious communities are attractive because they appear to be havens of refuge to which one may flee to find comfort of mind and soul from a restless and ruthless world.

What is not so evident to the casual "outsider" is the price that has been paid to attain whatever stability, harmony, and security exists. It is here that we must point out the limitations incident to the Mennonite communities and, therefore, to Mennonite mutual aid. It should be said here that inasmuch as Mennonites may still be called a sect, the limitations of mutual aid are largely those of the religious sect itself.

The criticism is frequently made of the Mennonites that their outlook is basically selfish because it is primarily concerned with their own salvation and indifferent to the welfare and salvation of society as a whole. One critic pointed out to the writer that the Mennonites were similar to the Eskimos in one respect, namely, that they lived in society for hundreds of years but never significantly affected the life of society. He felt that Mennonites had developed the "good life" within their own communities but failed to transmit it out beyond themselves. This criticism cannot be accepted at face value in view of considerable contradictory historical evidence, nevertheless there is all too great an indifference to the major problems confronting the total society.

From the standpoint of history there is an explanation for this indifference. It must be remembered that the larger society, which included both the political state and the established churches, for centuries looked upon the doctrines, teachings, and communal practices of the Mennonites as heretical. Instead of being looked upon with favor as the "good life" these communities were looked upon with scorn and hatred; the leaders were branded as heretics and appropriate punishment measured out to them. When this continued for centuries it is easy to understand why there would be a tendency to be unconcerned with the salvation of society as a whole. This is not to justify the indifference but to explain it. The doctrine of separation of church and state lends further light to this seemingly selfish behavior. Menno-

nites have traditionally looked upon the state as a political instrument and a necessary evil for those who were not yet redeemed in society. This view was formulated in a time when the political state and the secular world were ruthless and unfriendly to the Mennonites and, therefore, considered evil. This doctrine has been tenaciously clung to throughout the centuries even in times when the political state was friendly to the religious sect.

1. SELF-CENTEREDNESS

The first limitation to Mennonite mutual aid then is its self-centeredness. Mutual aid has been practiced very frequently in the local communities among Mennonites themselves to the exclusion of all non-Mennonites. Regardless of how trustworthy, religious, and reputable an individual might be if he did not happen to be born a Mennonite or if he had not chosen to join them, he could not share in the mutual activities of his Mennonite neighbors, at least not in the organized activities. This is definitely a characteristic of the in-group or the we-group. It is the result of peculiar customs, feelings, and codes of behavior that have developed. Many of these customs and modes of behavior are petty and are unrelated to the basic principles of Christianity. The group frequently becomes so interested in preserving its traditions and customs that it neglects some of the greater universal religious principles. If it does not neglect them it at least gives them secondary consideration.

To the extent that mutual aid is thus confined to a strictly closed group and does not keep open channels through which new members and new ideas may be brought in and worthwhile ideas and needed assistance taken out of the group, it becomes selfish, and thus definitely limits the opportunities for good that it may do. It is a hoarding of its own virtues for its own sake. It has frequently made mutual aid and its other virtues an end in themselves instead of making them the means whereby the Christian circle is ever extended. Dougall's word of warning on this point is appropriate:

The small community of select souls, exceedingly valuable as it is, is not an end in itself. The truth learned in such a fellowship must be made explicable to the world. The outer world must constantly be drawn into the fellowship, or else the members, having no universal aim, will be satisfied with only the partial expression necessary for their mutual understanding. The individual remains dwarfed except as a member of a "beloved community," and the loving community degenerates except when it seeks to save the world.³⁵

A group, just as an individual, must lose itself in the larger good if it is to find itself. Mennonites have from time to time been in grave danger of being satisfied with only a partial expression of the Christian message; they have at times tended to look upon their communities as ends in themselves.

2. HESITATION TO EXPERIMENT AND EXPLORE

A second limitation to Mennonite mutual aid is its hesitancy to explore, adventure, and experiment in new fields. It has tended to be satisfied with the

35. H. B. Streeter, Lily Dougall, et al., *The Spirit* (New York: Macmillan, 1935), p. 231.

old and the traditional ways of doing things. There is resistance to change. The new it suspected of evil before it is examined or understood. This is, of course, related to the conservative nature of the group as a whole. It has venerated the old and circumscribed it with religious sanctions. The degree to which this has been done has resulted in a corresponding lack of creativity and originality. New inventions and discoveries are accepted cautiously, but they are, nevertheless, eventually accepted. Inasmuch as Mennonites are not inclined to be socially and mechanically explorative and experimental, the failures, trials, and hardships incidental to experimentation and progress are left to be borne by other. This does not mean that Mennonites have not played the role of social pioneer in the past, nor that they can not do so in the future. It does mean that there is a tendency to allow the original tenets to crystallize and to look upon them as changeless.

3. ABSOLUTISM AND OPPOSITION TO CHANGE

It is a characteristic of Mennonites, as well as other religious sects, to look upon its beliefs and teachings as absolute; as specially revealed and God-given and, therefore, permanent and changeless.³⁶ It is this absolutism which enables the group to defy the world and be nonconformist. This supreme certainty extends beyond the creation and development of an economic security; it is certainty regarding supernatural protection in all emergencies and certainty regarding life after death.³⁷ To the extent that this absolutistic spirit abides in Mennonite communities it is naturally contrary to any evolutionary concept of life. Hence no amount of scientific research and rational enlightenment will be allowed to change the central principles which are looked upon as absolute. There is no allowance for the growth and development of ideals; they are once and for always fixed and permanent.

One cannot say that Mennonites hold absolutely to a changeless ideal. They may do so in theory but not in actual fact because there are changes in both ideals and practices. These changes, however, are exceedingly slow for the most part and are subtly made so that they appear more absolute than they really are. In fact, then, the Mennonite ideals become relative absolutes. While such absolutism may be considered a limitation to Mennonite communities, it may also have some advantages in that it is a preserver of some of the "good" as well as the useless customs. It may serve as a steadying force in society in times of social and economic and religious unrest.

36. Ruth Shonle, "The Isolated Religious Sect" (Unpublished Master's thesis, Dept. of Sociology, University of Chicago, 1923). See also Park and Burgess, *op. cit.*, pp. 613-19.

37. Lee Emerson Deets. *The Hutterites; A Study in Social Cohesion* (Gettysburg, Pa., 1939). Deets demonstrates this point in the case of the Hutterites but it applies to a large section of the Mennonites as well.

4. COMPLACENCY AND SUPERIORITY COMPLEX

A further limitation to Mennonite mutual aid is that which results from the complacency and the attitude of superiority that one frequently finds in Mennonite communities. The causes of these undesirable social attitudes are varied. They may originate partly as a result of their somewhat dogmatic religious point of view and partly as a result of their relatively great economic and social security. Living within the same community for an entire lifetime and having comparatively few experiences outside the local community tends to develop a petty provincialism. Furthermore, having limited outside cultural contacts makes impossible a basis for individual and group contrasts and comparisons. For this reason the group criticism, if it criticizes itself at all, is very likely to be from a narrow, unobjective, provincial point of view. Not having exposed itself to world-wide currents and influences, the group can naturally not criticize itself from a world or a universal point of view. The limitations of Mennonite communities due to complacency, provincialism, and attitudes of superiority are in direct proportion to the degree to which they are isolated from the rest of society.

It is, of course, possible to be in the world but not of it as Mennonites frequently claim to be. But this raises the question as to how one in such a position can intelligently judge issues and criticize undesirable features of the "world." A group claiming to live in approximate isolation from the "world" must either be oblivious of all that is going on about it or it must depend on some source in the "world" for its information. If it does the former it cannot intelligently criticize or evaluate the good and bad in society nor can it contribute effectively to the needs of society; if it does the latter, it asks of another something it is not willing to do for itself.

5. UNTRIED IN URBAN INDUSTRIAL COMMUNITIES

The fifth limitation of Mennonite mutual aid that we shall discuss here is that it has been practiced almost exclusively in small, rural, agricultural communities and has not been effectively demonstrated in industrial communities or in highly centralized areas of industry and commerce.

It has been practiced in religious communities where there is a large amount of cultural homogeneity, primary social relations, and community of ideals. It is a question whether it could be practiced equally effectively in large urban communities and industrial and commercial centers where there is great cultural heterogeneity, secondary social relationships, and great diversity of religious and social ideals.

In this thesis we have not attempted to show that Mennonite mutual aid was a contribution toward the solution of all social problems; nor that mutual aid as practiced by the Mennonites could be effectively practiced in all other social groups and realms of society. It has been an effective social device of the Mennonites

for their way of life. It may not be equally effective in highly industrialized communities or in highly centralized urban areas. This we acknowledge as a definite limitation of Mennonite mutual aid. There are possibilities that it might be effectively used in these areas of society with modifications in the structure and function of industrial and commercial operations, but this is pure speculation and is not of concern here.

While we must admit that Mennonite mutual aid has never been tried on the large scale required in many of the modern commercial and manufacturing industries, it may be significant that Mennonite mutual aid has frequently extended itself into the international consumers' and producers' Co-operative Movement. This movement has demonstrated that a co-operative organization can successfully invade the industrial and commercial fields on a large scale. This is illustrated in the case of co-operative organizations in the Scandinavian countries, in Great Britain, and in America. While the Co-operative Movement is not synonymous with Mennonite mutual aid, the two have many techniques and ideals in common. The implication, therefore, exists that Mennonite mutual aid demonstrated successfully in numerous local communities might gradually be extended into the larger areas of society and practiced on a larger scale. This is exactly the way the Co-operative Movement developed.

It is true that Mennonites have frequently depended upon the products of capitalistic owned and operated industries which are often controlled by individuals far removed from the labor and the factories producing the products they use. This is a situation directly antithetical to the philosophy and practice of Mennonite mutual aid. It is doubtful whether Mennonite mutual aid could successfully operate in such a structure. In this sense it is a limitation to the establishment of a universal Christian world order. It is, however, fair to raise the question as to whether a highly centralized industrial order based on the philosophy of Capitalism is a contribution toward the realization of a Christian world order. This leads us to say that even if Mennonite mutual aid could be effectively transferred from the small, rural, agricultural community to the larger, urban, industrial centers it might still not be contributing toward the establishment of a universal Christian community.

6. BASED ON PTOLEMAIC UNIVERSE OF PRIMITIVE CHRISTIANS

Finally we must remind ourselves of the fact that the Mennonites have claimed the first-century Christian community as the pattern for their own conception of the true Christian community and way of life. This has many advantages as we have seen in the previous discussion of this thesis. There are, however, also some limitations which must not be overlooked. The primitive Christians lived in a Ptolemaic universe of which the earth was the center. They

were not yet familiar with the Copernical theory of the universe under which we of the present day live. This theory claims the sun as the center of our universe, but which is only one universe in a measureless infinity. From the standpoint of social behavior and everyday living it may make little difference which theory of the universe a person accepts but from the standpoint of logic and rational theory the acceptance of the Ptolemaic conception of the world has definite limitations. Since Mennonites have traditionally been little concerned with philosophical explanations and logical formulas, this limitation has only slight significance for our study of Mennonite mutual aid.

E. Conclusion

The Mennonite view of church and community have traditionally been synonymous. The ideal is that of a Christian brotherhood which is Christo-Biblio centered and whose social relations are motivated by Christian love. We have shown that mutual aid has been an important contributing factor toward the establishment of this Mennonite ideal. The contribution has been primarily to the Mennonite community but it has not been confined to it. The degree to which it has been successfully practiced among the Mennonites has practical implications for the larger society beyond the borders of the Mennonite community. We have not attempted to show this larger contribution but to the extent that Mennonites intermingle with society at large the process of social interaction goes on and the larger society as well as the Mennonite communities are bound to affect each other. This conclusion is the result of simple logic. And it must remain largely a matter of logic because it is relatively impossible to measure accurately and quantitatively such abstractions as ideas and influences. While Mennonite mutual aid has made significant contributions to the development of Christian community among the Mennonites and, by implication, to the larger society, it also has definite limitations. These have not been overlooked in our attempt to evaluate the place and the importance of mutual aid as a social factor in the life of the Mennonites.
